

LANGUAGE MATTERS

A Dialogue on Language & Logic

Taha Abderrahman

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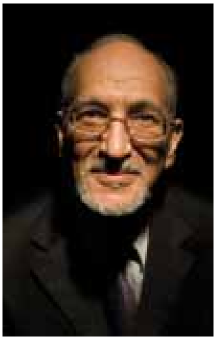
❧ *Tabah Essays* consist of short conceptual presentations by well-known authors, focusing on the elucidation of ideas to inform and stimulate new Islamic perspectives on the contemporary world.

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Abstract

The essay that follows seeks to illuminate new perspectives and insights on linguistics and language-related topics as a significant component of the intellectual project of Dr Taha Abderrahman. As one of the most eminent contemporary Muslim thinkers, selected questions raised by some of his foremost students and colleagues allow the author to dwell and expand on issues relating to logic and philosophy, touching briefly on matters of politics, religion, and theology.

About the Author



TAHA ABDERRAHMAN is one of the most recognized philosophers and thinkers in the contemporary Arab world. Beginning in Morocco, his scholarly journey took him to Paris where he received a Ph.D. in 1972. His thesis was entitled "An Essay on the Linguistic Structures of Ontology". In 1985 he received another Ph.D. in literature and humanities with a thesis entitled "An Essay on the Logic of Argumentative and Natural Reasoning". He held the position of professor of curricula for logic and linguistics at the college of literature and humanities at Muhammad the Fifth University in Rabat, from 1970–2005. He is a representative of the International Society for the Study of Argumentation in Amsterdam and the Society of Intercultural Philosophy (Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Philosophie) in Cologne. He received the Morocco Award for Humanities in 1988 for his book *Fī uṣūl al-ḥiwār wa tajdīd ʿilm al-kalām* (*On the Foundations of Dialogue and the Renewal of Dialectic Theology*), and again in 1995 for his book entitled *Tajdīd al-manhaj fī taqwīm al-turāth* (*Renewing the Methodology for Appraising the Tradition*). His many academic contributions include: *al-ʿAmal al-dīnī wa tajdīd al-ʿaql* (*Religious Practice and the Renewal of Reason*), *Ḥiwārāt min ajli al-mustaqbal* (*Dialogues for the Sake of the Future*), *al-Ḥaqq al-ʿarabī fī al-ikhtilāf al-falsafī* (*The Arab Right to Philosophical Disagreement*), *Rūḥ al-ḥadāthah: al-madkhal ilā ta'sīs al-ḥadāthah al-islāmiyyah* (*The Spirit of Modernity: Towards the Establishment of an Islamic Modernity*), and *al-Uṣūl al-akhlāqiyyah li al-maqāṣid al-sharʿiyyah* (*The Ethical Foundations of Islamic Legal Objectives*) (forthcoming).

Our practical experience and
involvement with multiple languages
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that he speaks.

– Taha Abderrahman

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Language Matters
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❖ *Dr Taha Abderrahman, tell us about your intellectual project, the stages that you have traversed, and the ground you have covered. Discuss also the horizons and outlook of future research in the study of logic and linguistics.*

THIS VENTURE IS IN LARGE PART defined by the ongoing state of research into the Arabo-Islamic tradition; more specifically, into the scientific methodology that characterizes this tradition. Our concern is that much of the current research into this tradition has been subjected to and dominated by the application of methodologies whose validity we do not accept for the following reasons:

1. They are methodologies that are imported (*manqūlah*) and not authentically connected to the tradition (*mawṣūlah*).

That is to say, they do not fulfill the logical requirements of the subject-matter to which they are applied. The manner in which they fail to fulfill these requirements is as follows:

a) These methodologies are borrowed from intellectual fields that are at variance with the field to which they are applied, and in a manner that does not critically review the procedural qualities nor take into account the specific logical features that are characteristic to this field.

b) They are detached from the causal elements that can bring about growth of the tradition, or even revolutionise it. This is because they are incapable of following the procedures that ensure that reinforcement is extended to and received from the tradition.

2. They are methodologies that are extrinsic and not complementary to the tradition. That is to say, they contain a logical misrepresentation that is manifested in the following aspects:

a) On a general level, they fail to fulfill the requirements of the *written text*. So when these methods – in the opinions they project and the conclusions they formulate – depend essentially on written texts, it becomes necessary that they do full justice to the linguistic and logical requirements of this written text. What we find is the opposite: that these methods treat these texts as if they are physical entities and external objects of study much like historical, political, social, and economic phenomena.

b) On a more specific level, they fail to fulfill the logical requirements of the *Islamic text*. They have failed to take into consideration – in Islamic thought and all of its fields – the wide-spread use of the methods

of logical reasoning and tools of dialectics, and of the precision and exceptional skill with which these two methodologies were meticulously practiced and implemented. It follows that we cannot consider the possibility of understanding Islamic thought as it should be understood, and imparting that understanding as it should be imparted, without extracting the tools of the deductive structure that underlies this thought.

c) They lead to the belief that it is possible to dispense with every type of theoretical and logical training, an act that would cause analytical research to result in blatant methodological errors, including: the lack of specificity (giving free reign to hasty generalizations); the lack of systematization (engaging in an assortment of disparate and unrelated issues); and the lack of focus (diverting on a tangent of superfluous and irrelevant discussion).

Our project aims at ensuring that the methods that we employ are free from the deficiencies that fall under two categories of flaws: the first we have called "importation" (*al-naql*) and the second "extrinsicness" (*al-dakhl*). We, therefore, would want that our methods – from one perspective – be authentically connected to the Islamic texts; that is to say, that we employ the linguistic and logical tools that the authors of these texts themselves had employed in their theses and analyses, and in their claims and objections. We engage in this, however, while simultaneously bearing in mind the historical difference and distance that exist between us and them. Were it to be shown that they have employed the logic prevalent in their historical juncture, that is to say Aristotelian logic, and the methods of theological argumentation which they had produced, then we

would be justified in employing, also from our point in time, the methods of modern mathematical (symbolic) logic and contemporary methods of argumentation.

In like fashion, we would want that our methods – from another perspective – be enriching and complementary, and their characteristic features be in agreement with those of the object of study to which they are applied. Thus, the traditional object of study, as previously mentioned, is linguistically and logically constructed and grounded, and cannot therefore be adequately described or explained except if the method of description or explanation is itself linguistic and logical in nature. This is precisely the method that we employ.

In the same vein, we also intend that these methods be a thorough examination of the traditional text, by which we mean exploring the specific details of the issues involved therein, and analyzing them with the utmost care and precision, without any prior tampering or manipulation of any of the details. We have taken it upon ourselves not to busy ourselves with passing judgment on the tradition except after having conducted this analysis – an analysis that must be completed before any verdict can be issued. In the process, we pursue a course of action that is totally and utterly at variance with that pursued by most researchers of the tradition who – due to the absence of this kind of analysis and due to the pressure placed on them by the ideological demands of their (academic) setting – either descend into simplistically lauding the tradition and embracing it, or discrediting it and abandoning it.

The first step that we have taken in this regard is to bring to the fore the linguistic principles underlying and underpinning philosophical meanings and understandings (see my book, *Langage et philosophie*, in French, 1977): "Our practical experience and involvement with multiple languages have been a crucial factor in uncovering the clear traces left behind in the philoso-

pher's intellectual and theological orientation by the structures embedded in the language that he speaks."

This led us to subscribe to the view of the relativity of philosophical meaning, that is to say, the philosophies that have been passed down to us and continue to be passed down are bound to and fixed in their respective worldviews. It is therefore necessary to make explicit the aspects that are distinctive in such a context, that are determined and accounted for by the philosopher's language, before rushing to embrace, promote, and defend them.

I also call for the necessity of establishing an Arabo-Islamic philosophy. The structure of the Arabic language will play a prominent role in the formulation and development of the content of this philosophy, in addition to its more general intellectual and scientific content. In fact, we maintain that it is necessary for this communicative linguistic structure to steer and direct such content.

In maintaining this view, some may charge me with wanting to confine philosophical thought to the realm of linguistic structure on the one hand, and with not wanting to take from different philosophies on the other. But this charge is unfounded: linguistic structure does not itself signify anything meaningful to us except insofar as: (a) it has the potential to enrich philosophical meaning in ways that are specific to and commensurate with the methods of expression encoded in this language; (b) it has the potential to meet the objective of influencing and persuading (the specific target audience); and (c) it has the power to motivate people and stimulate in them the desire to act on that which they have been persuaded of, since any content or meaning whose connection has been severed from this linguistic structure lacks the power to influence and sway. Similarly, this approach does not negate the potential to derive benefit from other systems of philosophy, so long as we recognize the ways in which the content – to which the particular philosophical import has been

subjected – has been transformed by the linguistic structure that has been applied to it.

The second step that I have taken in establishing my project is setting out to examine the deductive structure of the traditional text, especially of the text pertaining to dialectical theology (*kalām*),* relying therein on the most recent developments in the area of Discourse Analysis and Dialectical Argumentation Theories. What we have attempted to highlight in this step is the potential to build an Arabic, scientific model of discourse; that is, a model that – in benefitting from the modern theories of Discourse and Dialectical Analysis – employs and exhausts the rich rhetorical and stylistic potential of the Arabic language. It does this by modifying the rhetorical and dialectical theories in a way that is suited to and commensurate with the rich rhetorical possibilities that characterise Arabic.

I have continued to pursue my efforts in applying the linguistic-logical method to various areas and domains of the tradition. When these analyses and applications have been accomplished, we should be in a position to lay the theoretical cornerstones that will underpin an Islamic methodology which, in turn, will formulate an authentic Arabic rhetoric.

Questions on Linguistics

❖ *What are the primary differences between the three levels of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics in a linguistic approach? And which of these can be considered primary?*

THIS TRIPARTITE DIVISION migrated from logic into linguistics. Charles Morris, in his book *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*

* See my book *Fī uṣūl al-ḥiwār wa tajdīd ʿilm al-kalām*, 1st ed., 1987 (*On the Foundations of Dialogue and the Renewal of Dialectic Theology*).

(1938), distinguished between three components of the definition and demarcation of "semiosis" (sign-process):

- the sign as sign-vehicle,
- the sign as signification (*designatum,* the object of signification),
- the sign as a locus for interpretation (interpretant) from the viewpoint of the listener (interpreter).

The distinction between these three components further makes possible the distinction between:

- the level at which we study the formal relations of signs to one another,
- the level at which we study the relation of signs to the objects that they refer to (*designata*),
- the level at which we study the relations of signs to their interpreters.

Morris called the first level the "syntactical dimension," or "syntax"; the second level the "semantical dimension," or "semantics"; and the third level the "pragmatical dimension," or "pragmatics."

This tripartite division of signification was then transferred to the field of linguistics by the logician Rudolf Carnap in his book, *Introduction to Semantics*. This is how linguists ended up studying it. Pragmatics is comprised of three parts: (1) pragmatics of indexicals or indexical signs, which investigates demonstrative pronouns, and other pronouns whose signification changes when the circumstances, context (occasion), time or place of its articulation change; (2) pragmatics of implicature, which figures out the implicated meaning, by taking recourse to the sum total of mutually shared background information be-

tween speaker and hearer, and to the hearer's ability to infer the meaning from the context; and finally (3) pragmatics of speech acts, which specialises in the study of the goals of speech, such as affirming, negating, requesting, forbidding, promising, threatening, apologizing, warning, etc.

Based on this, pragmatics is both a usage-based theory, because it investigates language as used by its speakers, and a communication-based theory, because it studies the prerequisites of transmission and communication that the speakers aim to achieve through this specific use of language.

As for which of these linguistic levels constitutes the primary level, if what is intended by "primary" is the logical beginning, then the primary level is the syntactic level; and if what is intended by "primary" is reality or the real world, then the primary level is the pragmatic level. In any case, this tripartite division is a logical division that expands progressively in scope. So, semantics is wider in scope than syntax, because it includes meaning as an additional element, while pragmatics is wider in scope than semantics, because it includes the speaker as an additional factor. The relationship that holds between these levels is one of distribution, or strong entailment, in mathematical set theory nomenclature.

❖ *If the level of pragmatics is the basis or the primary state, then would it be possible to regard pragmatics as a suitable approach to research in all fields of knowledge in which natural language contributes to the production of knowledge and facts therein, such as the fields of philosophy, logic, and literature? If so, then where lies the originality of results arrived at by a pragmatic treatment?*

I BELIEVE THAT THE PRAGMATIC METHOD is suited for research in the fields of knowledge conveyed by natural language. Among

these fields are: (a) the field of literature, since Discourse Analysis Theory is a part of pragmatics; (b) the field of argumentation, which benefits a great deal from pragmatic analysis, especially Speech Acts Theory; and (c) the field of philosophy, which engages with pragmatics in a relationship of mutual exchange. The reason for this exchange is that the original founders of Pragmatics were themselves philosophers. J. L. Austin, the father of the theory of Direct Speech Acts (i.e. the meaning of *what is said*), is a central figure of British ordinary language philosophy. H. P. Grice, the father of the Theory of Indirect Speech Acts (i.e. the meaning of *what is implicated*) is also a philosopher. Finally, John R. Searle, who consolidated and worked this theory into a holistic system, is also a philosopher.

The linguists quickly and eagerly seized upon this philosophico-pragmatic thought, worked out and systematized its laws, fleshed out its problems and questions, and expanded its scope of application. Moroccan linguists especially have started to show an interest in it, with my colleague Ahmad al-Mutawakkil at the forefront. He is a distinguished linguist in the field of pragmatic syntax working to establish the most stringent and rigorous conditions for Arabic grammar. I, in turn, have benefited from the pragmatic dimension in the study of philosophy and dialectical theology (*kalām*). Together we contributed to the establishment of the pragmatic foundations of this intellectual discourse. We came up with results that cannot be matched – in specificity and precision – by the historical method that has dominated traditional Arabo-Islamic study. The principles of scholastic logic (in *Uṣūl al-ḥiwār*, p. 140) and maxims of mutual rational engagement that we have established are adequate proof of the rigour and precision in dealing with the tradition. We will address ourselves in the future to the state of philosophy in the Arab world while conducting an assessment of the Moroccan contribution with respect to it. We will likewise address ourselves to the ob-

ligation of philosophy as we view it, laying down alternative principles of philosophy and conditions for philosophizing in a manner that tends towards pragmatics.

The originality of the results that a pragmatic approach yields is seen from two perspectives: the perspective of form and the perspective of content.

1. *Perspective of form:* These results are generated in a very controlled and coordinated manner, by means of holistically-constructed discursive models that fulfill the requirement of two types of adequacy: weak (that is, *descriptive adequacy*) and strong (that is, *explanatory adequacy*). This means that judgments and claims made according to *Balāghī* (rhetorical) and *Uṣūlī* (scholastic) methods, by providing them with a pragmatic context, will have moved away from being described as irrelevant, fragmented, and arbitrary – which is how they were described prior to being placed in this context – to being described as systematic, rational, and coordinated.
2. *Perspective of content:* Such results are characterized by three properties:
    a) Scientific achievement and progress: These pragmatic models contributed to the discovery of facts not previously accessed or discovered in the field of rhetoric and argumentation.
    b) Evaluation: These models made possible a fresh look into previous research in *balāghah* (Arabic rhetoric) and *uṣūl* (scholastic method) by focusing on those questions that are in need of assimilation and formulation, and by reviewing some other questions that require greater descriptive and structural rigour and precision.
    c) Extension: The benefit of these results extended beyond the traditional framework of rhetoric and

argumentation to a domain wider than natural language. This is because the rhetorical and argumentative devices that have been established in the pragmatic models are not only suitable for describing methods of artificial production of speech embellishment, or the affected creation of an elegant and adorned impact on a specific level of discourse, but also for describing various methods of transmission and communication, and varying ways of persuading and being persuaded with each of these levels.

❖ *There are (basically) two positions on the relation of traditional Arabic grammar to modern linguistics: (a) a position that claims that modern linguistics has surpassed traditional Arabic grammar, and hence we can sort of dispense with the latter (i.e., we no longer have need for Arabic grammar); and (b) a diametrically opposite position which sees traditional Arabic grammar as being fully adequate, and we therefore have no need to resort to modern linguistics. What is your view concerning these two positions?*

IT IS AN ACCEPTED FACT that the advent of Modern Linguistics and the development of its grammatical methods would lead to the adoption of various positions vis-à-vis traditional Arabic grammar in the context of these new linguistic developments. It is also an accepted fact that it would require an assessment of the theoretical and practical results of each position adopted vis-à-vis this grammar.

It is true that novelty, from one angle, and diversity, from another angle – qualities by which Modern Linguistics has been characterized – have a powerful influence in drawing the attention of Arab researchers and scholars towards it, with some Moroccan scholars being in forefront of this movement. It is

therefore only natural that some of these scholars would try to put aspects of traditional Arabic grammar to the test of these modern methods and assess its procedural tools and devices in light of them.

The project of gauging traditional Arabic grammar against Modern Linguistics requires that certain conditions be met, without which the project will be of little value:

1. The linguistic researcher should be thoroughly acquainted with the theoretical linguistic models in terms of synthesis and classification.
2. He should be thoroughly acquainted with the theoretical principles, both logical and mathematical, on which these models are based, and which require a highly solid and deeply intensive theoretical make-up.
3. He should not be contented with a mechanical imitation of the current linguistic models. On the contrary, he should be able to produce his own models which fulfill the theoretical requirements, and are comparable and on par with those imported from the West.
4. He should have a mastery of traditional Arabic grammar, be conversant with and experienced in its most accurate descriptive and analytical tools, and have verified its historical causes and theoretical requirements.

If the linguistic scholar does not meet these four criteria – a thorough acquaintance with the modern linguistic methods, a thorough acquaintance with the (traditional) Arabic grammatical methods, an adequate theoretical make-up, and the ability to independently produce similar models – then his views and conclusions will hold no credibility and carry no weight, whether in terms of what he has imported and reported in a Western language or in terms of what he has established with Arab linguists.

If we are to follow these standards in evaluating the positions adopted vis-à-vis the Arabic grammar tradition, then we will soon find that the proponents of these positions have not yet managed to fulfill these requirements either fully or partially.

Based on this, the claim that traditional Arabic grammar has depleted its renewable energy and should therefore be dispensed with in favour of Modern Linguistics is completely unfounded. This is to say nothing of the fact that the author of this claim has ignored one crucial detail: the theoretical and methodological capability of past Arab grammarians far outstrips that of their modern counterparts despite the huge historical gap that exists between us and them, and despite the innovation of several state-of-the-art devices and techniques in language study and research during this vast period.

As for the counter claim – that we should content ourselves with Arabic grammar only and dispense with all modern linguistic methods – this depends on what is meant by this. If what we mean is that we should avoid the domination of Western linguistic methods over Arabic grammar and the blind application of these methods upon the latter, and thereafter emerge with general and categorical value judgments vis-à-vis the Arabic grammar tradition, then such a claim is well-founded, and no one but a dogmatist or contentious wrangler would dispute this.

On the other hand, if what we mean by this is that we stop at the limits and boundaries set by the traditional grammarians, while disqualifying every kind of training in modern linguistics and every attempt to become familiar with its methods, then this is something difficult to accept, for this can harm Arabic grammar and lead to disastrous consequences in the long run:

1. Such a total rejection would harm advancing the cause of Arabic grammar, since total rejection of modern linguistics can only lead to an increased devaluation of Arabic

grammar; this would occur if the person rejecting modern linguistics believes the existence and value of Arabic grammar to be contingent upon such a rejection.

2. Total circumvention of modern linguistic methods might deprive the Arabic researcher of the opportunity to acquire a methodological and theoretical constitution and training that will enable him to renew consideration of Arabic grammar. He will thus be enabled to renew consideration of Arabic grammar by bringing out the aspects that pertain to the descriptive, explanatory and pedagogical adequacy of this grammar, more than if he were to remain shuffling around aspects relating to this grammar without the aid of such a theoretical constitution and training.
3. For the researcher who champions the tradition but who is unfamiliar with the possibilities and limitations of modern linguistics, this renders himself powerless to resist the onslaught on Arabic grammar by hostile critics and incapable of winning over the trust of scholars and parties interested in what he has to say. This is especially the case if we consider that the adversary has the advantage of that which is new and modern because the new – whether in linguistics or something else – is more irresistible and more appealing to the ego than the old, even if it concerns Arabic grammar.

❖ *What contemporary scientific and theoretical value does the Arabic and Islamic tradition hold for us today in terms of* balāghah *(rhetoric) and* uṣūl *(Islamic theology and the principles of Islamic jurisprudence), from a pragmatic perspective? What would be the proper ways to interact and engage with it and benefit therefrom?*

IT IS CLEAR TO ANYONE who examines the Arabo-Islamic tra-

dition of Arabic rhetoric (*balāghah*), scholastic theology (*uṣūl al-dīn*), and principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) that it follows a pragmatic approach. There is no need here for me to mention the details of the methods used by al-Sakkākī, al-Jurjānī, et al., who propounded the idea of the requirements occasioned by the situation or context in the rhetorical approach. Similarly, there is no need to elaborate on the place of relations between speaker and listener in *uṣūl al-dīn* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* – relations which have taken the form of methods for stating a claim (*iddiʿā'*) and objecting to it (*iʿtirāḍ*). In my book *Fī uṣūl al-ḥiwār wa tajdīd ʿilm al-kalām*, I worked on extrapolating certain pragmatic rules for these methods. With respect to the ideal way in which to interact with the *Balāghī* and *Uṣūlī* tradition, we are of the view that it is incumbent upon the researcher to traverse the following stages should he want his program to be sound:

1. He should rid himself of preconceived, ready made, and loose judgments – judgments that sloppy researchers are in the habit of issuing and conveying to the multitude of interested readers or listeners, and resorting to as reasons whenever they are inclined to adopt a particular subjective stance vis-à-vis the tradition, whether of acceptance or rejection.
2. He should refrain from dividing the *Balāghī* and *Uṣūlī* tradition into distinct "areas" or "domains" such that one area is deemed acceptable and therefore deserving of investigation, while another is deemed unacceptable and undeserving of investigation; or that one area is deemed alive and dynamic – a dynamism whose causes we link to our contemporary situation – and another deemed stagnant and static, and whose affiliation to our contemporary situation we try to sever. We believe that this fragmentationist theory of the tradition lacks scholarly value, despite

its widespread popularity, and lacks serious consideration by both supporters and critics of the tradition. We believe that the real motivation behind this is rushing the requirements of research work, and the desire to adopt ideological positions vis-à-vis the tradition. For even if we accept the existence of errors and gaps in this or that domain, this should not deter the researcher from rigorously examining it and working on it, employing all the possible tools at his disposal, in order that its dimensions are revealed fully.

3. He should possess a total mastery of the methods of the past scholars, and an adequate training in the methods of the modern scholars in the area of pragmatics. Otherwise, he will fall victim to issuing judgments of praise or dispraise without any rational basis.
4. He should employ the most beneficial and most appropriate of modern methods in every area of the tradition, regardless of whether or not its value has been unanimously upheld. Because problems of the *Balāghī* and *Uṣūlī* tradition are related to discourse, the most suitable methods would be those that are discourse-pragmatic in nature. On the other hand, the appropriation and incorporation of methods that were originally founded for topics that are not discourse oriented into a particular area would amount to missing out on the opportunity to maximally benefit that area or in turn derive maximum benefit from it.

As for employing the *Balāghī* and *Uṣūlī* tradition, it can be done in two different modes and with two distinct requirements:

The first mode is to derive from the tradition concepts and principles, through which we enrich our new pragmatic system such that it develops horizontally. The requirement for this mode is that we define precisely the procedural aspects of the devices derived from the tradition; such definition would take the form

of rigorous rules by means of which we may oversee the operation of these devices in our new system.

The second mode is that we establish – via categories and rules derived from the tradition – a pragmatic model that incorporates the most up-to-date methods of pragmatics, while at the same time steering them theoretically in a direction that is suited to and congruous with the linguistic and theoretical requirements of the tradition, such that this model constitutes a vertical development of these methods. The requirement for this mode is that all the theoretical criteria known in the area of scientific theorization be found in this synthetic model – criteria regarding adequacy, coherence, consistency, simplicity, suitability, etc. This step is even higher and more far-reaching in terms of utilization. The first chapter of my book *Uṣūl al-ḥiwār wa tajdīd al-kalām*, entitled "Marātib al-ḥiwāriyyah (*The Degrees of Dialogue*)," is a contribution in this regard.

❖ *With respect to the belief in the effectiveness of the Pragmatic Method, would it be possible to build positions of a socio-political nature on such a belief?*

THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION requires that we bring to mind the very nature of pragmatics. Insofar as it is a branch of linguistics – i.e., what holds true for the latter holds true for the former – the links that it has with socio-political positions are the same that linguistics has with these positions. Furthermore, if we accept that linguistics is a science and that its "scientific nature" is the same as that of any empirical science, as some linguists maintain, then it would necessarily have certain links with these positions in the same way that physics does. No one can deny the fact that these positions only become tied to a science such as linguistics from the standpoint of the ends and goals stipulated for it, and not from the standpoint of the laws and equations

that control and regulate its subject matter.

It is true that pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that comprises elements that are social in nature with respect to those of its areas that deal with common and shared knowledge, context, and rights and duties of the speaker and listener. Nonetheless, the methods by which it treats issues such as these will continue to remain independent of practical and pragmatic positions. Even if it is possible to formulate socio-political positions based on pragmatics, then such a formulation would be something outside the very nature of a pragmatic treatment.

Yes, the scientific results in any field could sometimes be adapted and manipulated in order to realize certain practical and pragmatic aims without these results themselves giving rise to or calling for such compliance or being responsible for it.

Questions on Logic

❖ *One often hears the phrase "formal language," in juxtaposition to "natural language." Would you kindly explain to us the characteristic features of a formal language and its relation to natural language?*

A FORMAL LANGUAGE is a scientific language that is composed of three elements: an alphabet (inventory of symbols or letters), syntactical (or formal) rules, and inference rules. The alphabet is composed of a set of written symbols that are divided into constants and variables. The syntactical rules select from the possible syntactic constructions – via the symbols of the alphabet – the sum of grammatically valid or sound constructions. As for the inference rules, the most popular of them are the rule of substitution and the law of affirming the antecedent (i.e., *modus ponens*). These rules proceed from a finite set of grammatically well-formed constructions they transform into axioms – i.e.,

propositions whose truth is taken for granted – and then from which the rest of the grammatically well-formed constructions are derived. The best example of such a formal language is the language of predicate logic, which is used in the formulation of mathematics and many scientific theories.

Based on this, then, the construction of a formal language occurs in two distinct stages: the syntactic stage, which determines the grammatical propositions; and a systematization stage, which determines the logical propositions. It is this latter stage that has escaped the understanding of some researchers who started using the term that was actually coined for this stage in the original language outside its sphere of application, namely: "axiomatics" (or axiomatization). The truth of the matter is that this term has a very precise and definitive meaning, but at the same time it is simple to translate into Arabic. We have already explained what it means: to reason and infer from particular axioms. As for how to translate it into Arabic, we could say: *al-tansīq al-istintājī* (deductive systematization) or *al-tansīq al-musallamī* (axiomatic systematization).

The boundaries of formal language do not stop at syntax and deduction (inference). In fact, certain theoretical models may be designed that will assign to its propositions certain specific interpretations (such as number theory). An opposition might arise between language and the model, such that each deduced sentence is a sound proposition in the model (the soundness property), and every sound proposition in the model is a deduced sentence in the language (the completeness property).

Based on the aforementioned explanation, the differences between formal language and natural language should be apparent. In short, a formal language is a meta-language in which the levels are distinct and separated, whereas a natural language is an object language in which the levels are integrated and can only be used on the basis of such integration.

By virtue of it being a meta-language, a formal language can be used to describe a natural language. Generative grammar, for example, is a formal language designed to describe the level of syntax in natural languages; generative semantics is a formal language designed to describe the level of interpretation in natural languages; and conceptual pragmatics is a formal language designed to describe the level of pragmatics in natural languages. I have discussed this topic at length in my book *Al-Manṭiq wa al-naḥū al-ṣūrī* (Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 1983).

❖ *It is an accepted fact that logic is useful in the formulation of mathematics and the exact sciences, even in the formulation of some propositions of the empirical sciences. How do you perceive the use of logical tools in the area of the tradition, and how may they benefit this area?*

WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY POINTED OUT at the beginning of this dialogue that the intellectual tradition of Islam in terms of philosophy, speculative theology (*kalām*), law (*fiqh*), and language is replete with logical and dialectal information that was prevalent in that time, and that it is not possible – in our view – to fully grasp this tradition without mastering the tools of logic and dialectic. And if this holds true, then it also holds true that employing the methods of modern logic in describing and analyzing the tradition would be suitable and fitting to the nature and essence of the tradition. It holds true since we accept that the tradition is replete with deductive methods, some of which produce evidence, but the majority of which are steeped in argumentation.

One of the merits of employing the modern logical methods in this way is that it trains the Arab scholar and researcher to refrain from passing general and sweeping judgments on the object that he is researching. Another is that it teaches him to

follow the method of verification and authentication regarding the issues in the tradition that he is researching. This is in addition to the general intellectual training that he acquires by virtue of his experience in the use of logical methods.

We provided an example of this kind of logical usage in the section relating to syllogism and analogy in our book, *Fī uṣūl al-ḥiwār wa tajdīd ʿilm al-kalām*. While only one sense of equivalence relation (*al-mumāthalah*) was prevalent amongst historians of Islamic philosophy, we pointed out that – via the tools of logic – there exist four senses of equivalence relation, each one of which constitutes a holistic and autonomous system governed by a specific set of laws – laws that it does not share with other systems.

❖ *With the development of mathematical logic, there has been a renewed interest in the logic of modal propositions, and this interest has increased with the appearance of "the theory of possible worlds." What exactly is this theory, and in what ways is it related to modal logic?*

IT IS KNOWN THAT MODAL LOGIC is the logic that specializes in the study of propositions whose composition contains the terms "necessity" and "possibility" (or contingency), like when you say: "It is necessary that a triangle be a geometrical figure composed of three intersecting sides," or when you say: "It is possible that al-Ghazzali was a physician." Some of the rules of this type of logic are: "existence follows necessarily from necessity," "possibility follows necessarily from existence," "the necessity of necessity follows necessarily from necessity," "the necessity of possibility follows necessarily from possibility," and so on.

However, the logicians did not stop at this syntactic deductive level of modal logic. Rather, they moved beyond it onto the

semantic level, attempting to construct models for interpreting these deduction rules and laws of inference. In the sixties, one of these logicians, Saul Kripke, introduced the concept of "possible worlds," claiming that he derived this idea from Leibniz. From this notion of "possible worlds," he interpreted the concepts of "necessity" and "possibility" in the following way:

- a proposition is necessary when it is true in all possible worlds;
- a proposition is possible when it is true in one of the possible worlds; and since the possible worlds are connected such that one leads to the other, the following most general interpretation has been applied to "necessity" and "possibility":
  - a proposition is necessary in the actual world when it is true in every possible world to which the actual world leads.
  - a proposition is possible in the actual world when it is true in one of the possible worlds to which the actual world leads.

No sooner had the construction of such possible semantic models become established for the logicians than the doors of philosophical reflection and renewed inquiry into traditional philosophical matters opened up in front of them.

Of these new philosophical problems, there is one that pertains to the ontological status of possible worlds and the existence of objects or entities in multiple possible worlds. Of the old problems that have received renewed scholarly interest is the issue of essential and accidental properties, and the concept of resemblance and similarity.

The Arab philosopher continues to be ignorant of this revival that has occurred in the field of philosophy as a result of the theory of possible worlds. His ignorance in this regard returns

to his lack of aspiration for mastering the tools of modern logic, and his unfamiliarity with what has been written hitherto in the foreign languages. And on both counts, ignorance is inexcusable.

Questions on Philosophy

❖ *It seems obvious from all your statements that there is a clear commitment to the philosophy of phenomenology, and an explicit rejection of Cartesian rationalism and materialist philosophical movements. How would you account for the decline of this philosophy in the West in the contemporary period? Would it be possible for this philosophy to put forward a theory on the historicity of knowledge? Why is it that this philosophy has not been able to take off and become widespread in the Arab World despite the attempts by Professor Hasan Hanafi?*

WHAT I KNOW ABOUT PHENOMENOLOGY is that it is a purely descriptive method primarily concerned with the examination of phenomena with respect to their relation to consciousness, seeking out in the process the essences that exist in them. It hinges on two essential principles: intentionality and suspension, or bracketing. My own research activities are theoretical attempts that are primarily based on the results arrived at in the area of logic, linguistics, philosophy of logic, and philosophy of linguistics. There is nothing that can possibly show that it has anything in common with phenomenology, which is closer to a reflective and idealist inquiry than it is to logic and science. Therefore, I do not see this question as offering any valid objections regarding my own work. The phrase "*tawajjaha 'ala*" in the language of disputation (*al-munāẓarah*) means "to make a valid objection." In the terminology of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), it is a false or invalid consideration (*fāsid al-i'tibār*), because the one

objecting considers my logico-linguistic approach as something that it cannot be considered to be, namely, phenomenology.

The truth is that contemporary Arabic philosophical writings do not reflect any familiarity with any knowledge of logico-linguistic-based research, and we ascribe that to the following reasons:

1. preoccupation with historical, social, and political methodologies, blind to the fact that each of these are but one of numerous methodological choices – one of which does not necessarily surpass others in terms of logical requirements;
2. contentment with – especially in the Arab west – knowledge derived from subjects written about in French, while it is well-known that the French philosophical output is dominated by the historical spirit and is steeped and locked in philological method. This insistence on the French intellectual and philosophical output, and the reluctance to be open to what has been written in other languages, such as English and German, has had a huge impact on setting Arab research in general – and Moroccan research in particular – on a philological and literary course that steers away from precision and immerses itself instead in vague generalizations; and
3. mastery of the logical and linguistic areas of inquiry yet to be attained by the student of Arab philosophy, for until today many contemporary Arab philosophers are not convinced – in the way in which their predecessors were convinced – of the necessity of an adequate command of logic.

As regards the rejection of Cartesian rationalism, let us be reminded that the fanatical adherence to such rationalism in the

Arab World began at the time that Taha Hussein was mesmerized by the charm of French culture. Some contemporary Arab scholars continued in this fanatical loyalty despite the opposition and circumscription faced by rationalism in its own place of birth. Instead of taking this revision (of rationalism) into consideration in their assessment and evaluation of the Islamic tradition, such sycophants opted to remain obstinate and hold fast to that which others have long abandoned and have since moved on from, even when these others were themselves the formulators of this rationalism.

Based on this, we assert the following:

First, the objective causes of Cartesian rationalism have disappeared, and with that the right to continually assert the eternal truth of rationalism and its ability to assess and appraise the Islamic tradition.

Second, Cartesian rationalism is to be presented, even with Descartes himself, as a discourse in which only criteria pertaining to dialectical argumentation and speech communication apply. So it would *a fortiori* have to give precedence to argumentation and speech communication over the "rational demonstration" that this rationalism claims to adhere to.

As for the materialist philosophies, it is clear from what I have said that my methodology – based as it is on pragmatic linguistics, logic, and argumentation theory – cannot but be a preference that is contrary to these philosophies. I have outlined the reasons for this preference elsewhere, and hence there is no need to repeat them. It will suffice for me to just point out two fundamental methodological issues:

Firstly, some of the issues that these materialistic philosophies claim to treat uniquely can actually be treated equally in pragmatics and argumentation, employing methods that are more precise and more eloquent, such as the concept of "act" or the concept of "command," etc.

Secondly, pragma-dialectical theory strives as much as possible to control the relations that exist between the text and the real world that it describes, formulates, or innovates, whereas the materialistic and socio-historical methodologies ignore this dimension. They are thus free from the methodological constraints that a movement from text to reality forces upon it. In truth, so long as the conditions of this movement are not gathered and systematically ordered, there can be no theoretical value in the conclusions thus produced. However, that does not preclude some people from drawing benefit from them, particularly if certain minds become enamored by them and their will bound to them – that is to say, if these conclusions are subjected to a particular ideological orientation and compulsive use.

❖ *How is it possible to repudiate the claims of those who have cast doubts about the motive behind your critique of professors al-Jābirī and Muhammad Arkoun, namely that your critique involves some previous personal vendetta; or to put it differently: Why al-Jābirī and Arkoun in particular?*

MY CRITIQUE of Muhammad Arkoun and Muhammad ʿAbid al-Jābirī is purely a logical critique, and it is justified on purely methodological grounds.

Let us start with these justifications. As you are aware, the subject matter of my work, *Fī uṣūl al-ḥiwār wa tajdīd ʿilm al-kalām*, is the methodology of dialectics in the Islamic tradition. Furthermore, this methodology is linked to two fundamental problems: one is logical and the other linguistic.

The Logical Problem: These two scholars embroiled themselves in this problem when they discussed Islamic rationalism. Each of them criticized the rationalism of dialectics – which is the methodology of Islamic speculative theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*)

and scholastic jurisprudence (*ʿilm al-uṣūl*) – but for reasons that are diametrically opposite to those of the other: al-Jābirī regarded this methodology as being deficient in its rationalism (a rhetorical rationalism that we need to go beyond), while Arkoun considered it to be extravagant and over-the-top in its rationalism (a demonstrative, Aristotelian rationalism that we need to abandon).

The Linguistic Problem: Both of these scholars tackled this problem. Arkoun claimed that we should use conclusions of modern linguistics in the theorization of "the Islamic methodology," while al-Jābirī claimed that we should generalize the conclusions of Arabic linguistics to cover the entire Islamic intellectual corpus, with the exception of Averroist philosophical thought.

My own research involved developing a logico-linguistic methodology and applying this methodology specifically to a subject that is itself logical and linguistic in nature, namely disputation/argumentation (*munāẓarah*). As a result, it became inevitable that I would tackle the two opposing stances of al-Jābirī and Arkoun, and that I would review the positions they had developed; in fact, engaging one of them logically necessitated engaging the other, by virtue of the one being the contradiction of the other. Finally, I have dealt so far only with one discrete aspect of their thought; however, due to the ramifications of their positions, I feel it necessary to also address other aspects of their thought in the future, such as al-Jābirī's stance towards the tripartite division (*al-burhān*, or demonstrative thought which is fully rational; *al-bayān*, or figurative linguistic thought which is semi-rational; and *al-ʿirfān*, or mystical thought which is supra-rational), or Arkoun's approach to readings of the Qur'an. Of course, there are also matters unrelated to either of them, the provenance of which may be the Arab east or the Arab west, and which likewise need be addressed.

The entirely logical character of my critique of al-Jābirī and Arkoun may be inferred by the object of the critique's focus. It does not merely concentrate upon the assumptions underlying their positions, whether methodological or otherwise. Rather, it focuses more specifically on the methodology upholding their conclusions from these given assumptions. I have demonstrated with absolute proof the logical inconsistencies in their methods. The critiques they proffer towards the Islamic methodology are, in truth, more applicable to their own methodology! Al-Jābirī engages in literary analysis (*bayān*) when he should be engaged in demonstration (*burhān*), and Arkoun himself engages in rationalization (*taʿqil*) where he himself is calling for a method diametrically opposed to rationalization. The implausibility of their method reveals inconsistencies either of unjustified distinctions (*mufāraqah*) if unintentional, or of logical fallacies (*mughālaṭah*) if intentional. There is no acceptable way to remove this inconsistency. Anyone who denies this and ascribes it to sound logic is arrogant, obstinate, and undeserving of being debated.

❖ *You performed a critique of the proponents of demonstrative proof (*al-burhān*) from amongst the Islamic philosophers, and showed instead a preference for an inquiry based on principles of* kalām *and* uṣūl. *Does this critique have a connection with the school of Mustafa Abdurrazzaaq whose followers reject as false and absurd the primacy of peripatetic philosophy in Islam?*

IT IS TRUE that we have rejected with the strongest of arguments Aristotelian peripatetic philosophy in its Arabic context, but not in its Greek context. We have maintained that embracing this thought by the Arabs does not satisfy all of the linguistic and logical requirements that must be fulfilled in everything that is

imported from the 'Other':

1. Among the instances of violating the *linguistic requirements* is that linguistic expression of Islamic philosophers were contrary to the pragmatic demands of the Arabic expression. Hence, their writings became abstruse and difficult for people to understand due to their poor linguistic construction. As a result, their influence on Arabic thought in general waned naturally, and not as a result of any persecution or imposed restrictions (contrary to what later historians of philosophy might want to believe). They endured no more restriction than that endured by others, such as jurists, theologians, and sufis. We do not know of any philosophers having been whipped, burnt, or crucified, as was the case with some of the latter group. Rather, the reasons for the decline of their influence were internal and returned to the methods that were at the heart of the linguistic construction of their thinking. It was these very methods that severed the lines of communication between them and the majority of Arabic speakers.
2. Among the instances of the failure to fulfill the *logical requirements* is the fact that their philosophical claims flew in the face of the requirements of logical proof, contrary to what they themselves claimed and what some historians of philosophy amongst their ardent supporters claim today. Their arguments are no less dialectical, and no more demonstrative, than the arguments employed by others, such as Muslim theologians and scholastic jurisprudents. Both groups utilized demonstrative and dialectical methods, like analogical reasoning and comparisons, while the philosophers might perhaps have been less successful in their ability to use them because of their deviation from the linguistic conventions of Arabic and their insistence on

following the linguistic conventions of the Greeks, on the basis that they are logical and demonstrative.

With regard to the objection leveled against my critique – namely, that philosophers are logicians and thus closer to adhering to its methods in providing reasoned arguments for the issues that they hold – I hold that this charge is not germane for the following two reasons:

1. The philosophers' knowledge of logic is no stronger intrinsically than that of other people. In fact, some Muslim jurists and theologians far surpass them in understanding the nature, dimensions, and scope of logic. For example, it was the latter who argued for its status as an autonomous discipline, a position not articulated by the philosophers in any clear fashion and who then incorporated it into other non-philosophical domains (that is to say, they found other non-philosophical applications for it), whereas the philosophers lagged in this respect.
2. The difference between philosophical claims and logical claims was never clear in the minds of the philosophers, who applied the requirements of the former to the latter as a result of this obfuscation. On the other hand, others such as the Muslim jurists and theologians consciously aimed for a systematic and methodical separation between them and worked toward the extraction and severance of logic from its Greek metaphysical context.

Thus, if it is the case that linguistic and logical conditions are our criteria for evaluating Aristotelian thought in the case of the Islamic philosophers, then they should also be our criteria for evaluating *Kalāmī* and *Uṣūlī* thought. The application of these criteria to the Islamic tradition necessarily implies the affirma-

tion of the following two facts:

1. The *Kalāmī* and *Uṣūlī* tradition did not suffice itself with merely employing the communicative and linguistic tools of the Arabic language; on the contrary, it subjected these tools to that which it had imported from elsewhere. In turn, it evaluated this imported subject matter in a manner similar to how it evaluated its own native material. So it modified and remodeled the content in accordance with selected values. This modification and remodeling was not a product of ignorance, nor did it constitute a violation of what was imported. On the contrary, it emanated from a basis of knowledge and awareness that was far superior to that of the philosophers; it subjected the imported information through a process of authentication (*aṣālah*), in both form and content, such that it became an authentic product of the Islamic pragmatic domain. This imported information did not remain a prisoner exiled and cut-off as was the case with that of the philosophers, who remained completely and utterly oblivious to the causes thereof.
2. The *Kalāmī* and *Uṣūlī* tradition carried out in excellent fashion the logical requirements suited to its subject matter and claims. The Muslim theologians and jurists did not claim to practice logical demonstration in a way identical to that of the logician, mathematician, or engineer. They were more perceptive than the philosophers as to the nature of logical demonstration in natural discourse. Furthermore, they confined their focus to building a coherent argumentative theory. Their theory regarding *mabḥath al-munāẓarah* – dialectic disputation – is an accomplishment which the philosophers themselves failed to achieve in the field of demonstrative reasoning.

It becomes clear from what we have said that the causes that led us to abandon and move beyond Islamic peripatetic philosophy, and instead to renew inquiry into speculative theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*) and scholastic jurisprudence (*ʿilm al-uṣūl*), are in the first degree pragmatic linguistic causes and logical demonstrative causes. On the other hand, the causes that led the school of Mustafa Abdurrazzaq to abandon and move beyond Islamic peripatetic philosophy relate to the subject matter of these three cognitive domains. If it appears that I agree with this school in certain aspects of Islamic thought, then it is not because of this method, nor because I am somehow influenced by it. In the same vein, our call for the abandonment of peripatetic philosophy only pertains to the methods through which it has been imported into the area of Arabo-Islamic pragmatics. With respect to this philosophy in its Greek milieu, it is of no concern to us. It might be right or wrong in that context; however, it still remains at least linguistically appropriate in its own milieu. With respect to the followers of the school of Mustafa Abdurruzzaq, they have tried to render this philosophy null and void from the perspective of its content in general, not from the perspective of it being an Arab formulation thereof, as I have done. This is the main point of contention between us.

> ❖ *What is your position on the critical tradition towards religion and the sacred books in Arab and Western thought? What is your position on the criticism leveled at* taṣawwuf, *specifically in the Arabic tradition and in contemporary Salafi thought?*

IN REGARDS TO THE CRITICAL TRADITION, there are three perspectives from which to respond:

1. *The basic logical perspective:* The tradition that is critical of religion, generally speaking, is no stronger in ratio-

nal proof, empirical evidence, or in practical rules than religion itself. The critic of religion is like the believer in religion: the objections proffered are equally applicable to the critic, whether in terms of weakness of premises, contradiction, or refutation; and the possibility of challenging these objections through either verification or falsification.

2. *The temporal historical perspective:* Few will disagree that, to date, the tradition that criticizes religion has not produced culture or civilization in the manner in which adherence to a religion has done. The objection that religion is the cause of what is referred to today as "religious extremism," or previously by the name of "religious fanaticism," is immaterial for two reasons:

   Firstly, not every religious believer necessarily descends into fanaticism. The principle, "To you your religion, and to me my religion," is one which has historically been accepted and put into practice by many of those who show a concern for religion as proponents or defenders.

   The second is that not every critic of religion is necessarily free from fanaticism. The critic, like the believer, is capable of the same fanaticism and equally capable of succumbing to it. This critic may then build on his ideas and beliefs certain practical stances that have certain practical implications and which, in turn, might harm others and deprive them of their right to disagree.

3. *The practical, realistic perspective:* There is no denying that, in our day, engagement in the criticism of religion has become trite. The awareness of religious activity in our lives is stronger and deeper than before, to the extent that we today are closer to the emergence of religious philosophies, than to the continuation of philosophies that are critical of religion, such as was the case in the previous two centuries, or the turn of our own. I foresee a revival of religious inquiry in the coming decades, and that this re-

vival will be led by philosophies based in belief and faith.

With respect to *taṣawwuf* and its critics – whether Salafis or non-Salafis (materialists, historians, positivists) – there isn't time enough remaining in our dialogue to do the topic justice. I hope to write about this topic in the near future. For now, it must suffice us to say that the criticisms leveled at *taṣawwuf* can themselves also be leveled at Salafis and non-Salafi critics. The following three qualities can equally apply to proponents of *taṣawwuf*, of salafism, and of materialism, historicism, and/or positivism:

1. *Innovation:* This is in line with what we may call "the principle of change." This principle asserts that every religious movement is prone – under the impact of factors of temporal progress, environmental transformation and personal training – to undergoing changes that distance it in small or large degree from its roots and origins.
2. *Rigidity:* This is in line with what we may call "the principle of life-cycle." This principle asserts that every religious trend possesses a lifespan that encompasses two phases that it must pass through. These two phases are either close in succession or far apart. The first is characterized by innovation (*ijtihād*) and renewal (*tajdīd*), and the second by rigidity and mere imitation.
3. *Colluding with the Enemy:* This is by virtue of what we may call "the principle of domination". This principle states that, during conditions of engagement, every religious movement tries to realize for itself the greatest possible domination over its adversary, by attributing to the latter the worst wrong that it can possibly be accused of which is colluding with the enemy.